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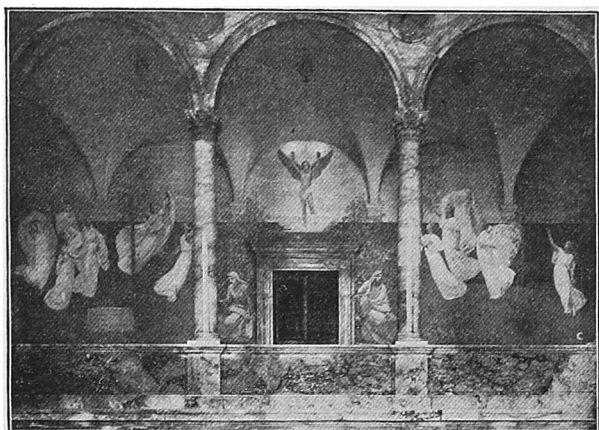
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THE ART OF MURAL PAINTING.



PUVIS DE CHAVANNES.

THE MUSES WELCOMING THE GENIUS OF ENLIGHTENMENT.

From a Copley Print.
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The great law of decoration is that the ornament shall set off and embellish, but never disguise, the thing ornamented; and in mural painting this thing is the wall, and its essential qualities of flatness and extent should be accentuated, not concealed. The principles of mural painting on which this decorative art is founded are the true conception of composition and color. It matters not whether the artist shall use one figure or twenty; whether his space be rectangular, circular or both, and also lopsided. In every instance the given space must be filled with a pattern of figures exactly suitable to the decoration required, nor can it be turbulent in its grouping.

Landscape is difficult of introduction in mural decoration because the demand to preserve the quality of flatness forbids too great realism in expressing distance. Still, many of the more modern mural painters go far afield in this choice of subject—differing thereby from the classic masters to whom we turn for the ideal mural art, Giotto, Raphael, Michel Angelo and Puvis de Chavannes, who used landscape sparsely.

Giotto, despite Ruskin's misplaced enthusiasm, may still be regarded one of the greatest muralists, because of the simple flatness of his masses, free from any elaborate modelling, the lightness and purity of his color, the excellence of his silhouette and his pattern. Raphael's preëminence in the art of composition has never been contested, while Michel Angelo understood the inner mysteries of form beyond compare. And that other classic master, Puvis de Chavannes—who can go to the Pantheon and not recognize his work to be the true decoration? His drawing, so austere and noble, the pale tints which have been called "the denial of color," they are exactly fitted for the place they occupy, absolute in accord, a part of the building itself—the delicate efflorescence, as it were, of the gray walls. And as the architecture may be called "the music that is frozen," the decoration is music that is throbbing and palpitating with life through its rhythmic harmony.

Great progress has been made these later years in the art of mural painting. The continued study of chiaroscuro has brought modern painters back to the shadelessness of the primitives. They also have become more imbued with the effect of omitted details, and how the specific quality in faces, gestures and attitudes may militate against that subordination and unity which mural composition should impose. The present-day decorator has learned that he must work with rapid decision on a large scale, aiming at broad effects, and must be willing to sacrifice subtlety to clearness of expression.

I cannot altogether agree with Charles Blanc, the famous French critic, who, speaking of mural painting, says: "*Elle est donc par elle-même la plus haute destination de l'artiste.*" Comparisons are odious. The painter of the easel picture has as high a destination, both in artistic accomplishment and in fame, as the mural painter has—and the muralist has no less.

When wandering through Europe and wondering at the old frescos, the stained glass marvels and the modern work, such as Paul Baudry's decorations in the Paris Opera House, one turns with heavy heart to these shores—until he sees the work done by our own men. The stained glass of John La Farge, the mural paintings of Sargent, Abbey, Vedder, H. O. Walker, Blashfield, Simmons, Mowbray, Kenyon Cox, Thayer and many others, will convince him that in this branch of Art the Americans are worthy peers of their foreign brethren.

A consideration of the work of American mural painters must remain for a following article.

SINCERITY IN ART.

"Old-fogyism (is) the worst disease that can affect the critical mind. Old-fogyism involves condemnation of what one doesn't understand, and as it discourages the effort to understand what is not familiar, it is on the side of the conservatism which is not to be distinguished from fossilization.

"None of the arts has escaped the old fogies."

—Extract from a daily paper.

" . . . We will call attention to the remarkable exhibition of Mr. (Arthur B.) Davies's work at Mr. Macbeth's. This will be open throughout the coming week, and we hope arrangements will be made to prolong the period. It is one of the most significant exhibitions that have been seen here of recent years.

"There is no artist in America who has attempted so daringly to scale the heights toward which Mr. Davies aspires and never before has Mr. Davies himself adventured so far. Let no one who pretends to any interest in current art fail to see this most notable exhibition."

—Extract from art review in *Evening Sun*.

So much for the two quotations that I have taken as texts for my discourse this morning.

But before really beginning my brief remarks I would like to set it down here that I have always been opposed to those critics who get cheap fun out of art by holding up musicians, actors, plays, songs, stories and pictures to ridicule. Anyone can make fun, and the man who makes a living by pulling down the work of his fellows for no other reason than to make comic copy is a parasite.

I have always been interested in pictures (although that fact may not interest anyone else), and American pictures have for the last twenty-five years held an especial charm for me. I have been among those who have foretold the coming glory of American art (a glory that is already here for those that have eyes to see), and I hope to live to see the day when "the man in the street" believes it.

New men, new methods appeal to me, and the fact that a picture is strange is no reason for damning it, with either faint praise, abuse or ridicule. Each fashion in dress is strange at first, then modish. But mere modishness does not last either in sartorial fashions or in works of art.

In painting pictures the artist should be constantly saying to himself, not, "Is it good for to-day?" but, "Will it be good twenty, a hundred years from now? Will it be good always?" He must strive to hit the universal note.

I read the *Evening Sun* critic's appreciation of Mr. Davies, and immediately took his advice to visit Macbeth's gallery, where in the past I have found American pictures that have made me wish all the art dealers on Fifth Avenue were as open-minded as Macbeth. And I had there seen pictures by Davies

that had shown him to be possessed of (and perhaps by) an imagination.

I walked along Fifth Avenue. I had already been moved to enthusiasm by the honest, poetic, optimistic work of Reynolds and Gifford Beal in the Clausen Gallery, and felt that they were "safe and sane" and would reflect glory on their motherland; I had been glad to welcome (at Tooth's) the work of the Scotchman Farquharson, the best of whose warmly glowing transcripts of Scotch scenery are among the paintings that will abide; I had noticed that in the exhibition of the Ten Americans, J. Alden Weir was running a half-dozen different ways, most of them pleasant ones, and that Childe Hassam, after many divagations, had at last gloriously found himself, and I went to the gallery of Mr. Macbeth, desiring to be filled once more with enthusiasm over the work of an American painter.

I entered the gallery and looked around.

Once a little friend of mine cut out some paper dolls and pasted them over her father's beautiful landscapes. The landscapes (remember this) were still beautiful, but the paper dolls, while they had something of the action that it often falls to the lot of caricatures to attain, were corpse-like in color and wholly lacking in modelling.

There was beautiful color in the landscapes, and when her father returned home from business, he took a hair brush and some warm water and washed the figures out of the landscapes—and then he turned his attention and his hair brush to his little daughter.

"Old fogysm is the worst disease that can affect the critical mind."

Well, if twenty years from now art lovers are going to rank those pictures of Davies's among the works of high merit that have been produced by Americans then I cheerfully acknowledge that I am an old fogy—and may I always remain an honest one.

I refer in particular to the naked triplets that occur and recur in picture after picture. He has chosen to distort them and to group them amongst lovely vegetation, and he leaves no clue to his reason for so doing.

There is one picture of a naked gentleman jumping feet first into a stormy sea. It has all the force of a caricature in *Jugend*, but it has not all the drawing that such a caricature would have.

As I have hinted, some of the landscapes show evidence of a lovely color sense, but most of the figure pictures look as if Mr. Davies had said to himself:

"Come, now, the public is a fool. It knows nothing about art. I will paint any old thing that comes into my head. I will make it mystical. I will show a lack of a sense of humor and then with the *Evening Sun* to back me my pictures will pass for the real thing."

But there are real art lovers left, even among the laity, and they are able to look out of their own eyes. They are not afraid of what is new, if it is sincere. Their eyes revel in tone poems without being told to revel, but they refuse to revel at the suggestion of the *Evening Sun* man or any other clever critic whose command over the English language is masterly, but whose eyes sometimes need the attention of an oculist.

Mr. Davies has done good work in the past and he can do it in the future, but he would better stop being mystical or his may be the fate of William Butler Yeats: he may suddenly find himself the object of a maidenly cult, and then Heaven help him!

CHARLES BATTELL LOOMIS.

An Index and Table of Contents of the 3d Volume will be added to the last number of the Volume on February the 1st of next year, so that reference to articles that may appear may be facilitated.

NEW YORK, April 4, 1905.

To the Editor of THE COLLECTOR AND ART CRITIC:

At the recent exhibition of Whistler's etchings from the Carter collection I noticed that Whistler's butterfly signature was much in evidence. Is this peculiar scroll nothing more than an arbitrary mark adopted by this man of moods, or is there some peculiar significance attached to it?

Yours very truly,

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The mystic emblem or device of a sort of Whistlerized butterfly was adopted in the '60's by the eccentric genius, James Abbott Whistler, who without any known reason changed his name later to James McNeill Whistler. Close study will reveal that this "peculiar scroll," as my correspondent happily calls it, is really a monogram of J. W. The earliest of the etchings to bear the butterfly is "Chelsea Wharf" (1863), but many paintings and etchings after that date are signed "Whistler."

Artists have sometimes signed their pictures in some distinct form instead of their names. It generally was done when the name might suggest some emblem or symbol. Thus Hieronymus Cock demarked two fighting cocks on his panels; Mariotto Albertinelli signed a cross with two interlaced rings, referring to the sacerdotal duties to which at one time of his life he devoted himself; Martin Rota, a wheel; Pieter de Ryng, a ring with a diamond; Giovanni Dossi, a bone; del Mazo Martinez, a hammer; Lionello Spada, a sword. Sometimes caprice dictated the selection, as when Jacopo de Barbéri used the caduceus or Mercury rod; Hendrik de Bles, an owl; Lucas Cranach, a crowned serpent; Cornelius Engelbrechtsen, a peculiar device resembling a weathervane, and Hans Holbein, a skull.



EDWARD SIMMONS.

THE JUSTICE OF THE LAW.

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